

SBC Bulletin Xtina

Well, Steph's wonderful *How I learnt to Play Bridge and Get Married* can't be capped. But it does explain their almost telepathic empathy when playing...

Here gardening is still trumping bridge by quite a long head. Imperfectly growing vegetables is great fun – broad beans over, but some lovely potatoes, spinach, rocket and now runner beans. The slugs seem to have been sated. I have tried all manner of things little pellets of wool, heels of wood ash, copper scourers unrolled tied around pots, and perhaps most successfully some odd little plastic cones into which you pour something yeasty like beer and give them a happy death.

Plums not ripe yet, but the mulberry is fruiting very heavily – Jane Grigson's lovely *Fruit* book recommends spreading white sheets under the branches while you harvest, hence the scene below... 12 jars so far.



Talking of jars, our bees, who live far down the garden on the right, have become admirably busy, and if anyone would like some 2020 Nutwood Honey and dares to venture to 14 Eynsham Road for a jar or two – profits again to Flexicare – they are welcome – email me on christina@christinahardymment.co.uk.

The grandchildren can be around much more too now – one set's house is being rebuilt so the noise drives them down the hill; another's has sold their house and not found another one in North Hinksey catchment, so they are actually moving in here at the end of the month. So as you can imagine, life is suddenly getting full.

But I now play at least twice a week online. It is great that so many of us are joining on; please spread the word among those hesitating to take the plunge. It feels a lot less faceless when you know the people you are playing against.

I still find it very hard to concentrate, especially when I discovered the History tab, which lets you see how you have been doing in the same humiliating way the bridgemates used to do. It leaves the mind in the past, and there is not really time for that – although having eight rather than seven minutes allows much needed breathing space and sometimes means you get time to make coffee or take a comfort break. I recommend NOT using it, and also keeping eyes and mind on the game, even if you are dummy or if opposing declarer seems to have gone into a trance.

What is really educational is using the History tab to go through each hand afterwards, trick by trick – and also to check what other people bid and how they played.

Having previously used Funbridge, I initially found the minimalist hand layout hard to take in. But by going to Practice on the BBO site, and clicking on Bridge Master, you can practice being declarer in challenging games – then the solution button explains how the seeming impossible can be achieved. It helps you to get used to the process and is educational into the bargain.

Right, back to pottering around the garden before the pattering of tiny feet...

Best to you all
Xtina